
Imperfective aspect and epistemic modality in Estonian

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Résumé

The interrelatedness of the TAM categories is without a doubt a well-researched area (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994; Saussure et al. 2007). However, the interdependencies of aspect and modality have received relatively less attention in comparison to tense and aspect. What is more, the research conducted so far, including on the connection between imperfective aspect and epistemic modality, has mostly been based on data from a few well-studied languages (see, for example, Haquard 2006 on French and Italian, Boogart 2007 and Boogart and Trnavac 2011 on Dutch and English). Even so, the semantics of the categories has proven to differ even among those well-known and studied Indo-European languages, let alone when smaller and less-known languages have been examined (see, for example, Cover 2010).

The aim of the present study is to contribute to the research of the interdependencies between aspect and modality on the example of a Finno-Ugric language, namely, Estonian. For this purpose, two Estonian modal verbs, *saama can*' and *võima be able to, be allowed to*', are studied. The goal of the analysis is to investigate whether the claim that the epistemic reading of modal verbs typically arises with imperfective complements (Boogaart and Trnavac 2011) is supported by Estonian. This is done by analyzing the types of modal readings *saama can*' and *võima be able to, be allowed to*' can express and in turn, which aspectual complements these readings arise with.

The results presented in this paper are based on a corpus analysis for which 400 sentences for both of the modal verbs *saama can*' and *võima be able to, be allowed to*' were manually tagged for their modal readings as well as the aspectual meanings they occurred with. Preliminary results suggest that the connection between imperfective aspect and epistemic modality is also true for Estonian.

Mots-Clés: aspect, epistemic modality, Estonian

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